

Mary's Legacy of Care Giving

Mother's Day, 2011

May 8, 2011

Fort Street Presbyterian Church, Detroit

Thank you, Chorale and musicians, for the anthem!

This morning, we will look at what Mary, the mother of Jesus, says about ***herself, about God, and the world***, in the first chapter of Luke.

In the Protestant tradition, we do not venerate Mary, or pray to her. Still, Mary is a major figure in Scripture and her words in this song deserve our thoughtful consideration.

Also, today is Mother's Day, and HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY to all mothers. Some of us here may not be mothers. We may deeply miss a mother who left this world, recently or many years ago. Others of us may not have pleasant memories of our mothers, or perhaps never knew our mothers. Perhaps we are mothers and our child is no longer with us, or refuses to communicate with us. Regardless of what we know, feel, or have experienced regarding mothers and mothering, I invite you to join me in looking at Mary's legacy of care giving.

I would like to highlight three elements of Mary's legacy of care giving.

- ***Mary's willingness to be a servant of God.***
- ***Mary's certainty of God's care for her and God's mindfulness of what Mary needed,***
- ***Mary's reliance on God's justice and goodness.***

All of us are caregivers. At home, we may care for people, and perhaps pets, and neighbors. Possibly we are responsible for ourselves, by ourselves. That is still care giving. Self-care is care giving.

At work, as we interact with others, we give care in the form of advice, counsel, or direction. We provide income for others if we are employers. If we are employees, we provide products or services. At school, or in our neighborhoods, care may be shown by active listening or by teaching someone a new skill or a new approach to a problem. At church, care may be expressed through committee work, providing music for a worship service, working in leadership, or sharing a smile and handshake with a first time visitor. All care is meaningful, and all care has a spiritual dimension.

In our First Reading, we hear Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's announcement of Mary's God-assigned mission: help to bring Jesus into the world and care for him.

In Luke 1:38, ***Mary says: "I am the Lord's servant."***

When we are presented with a challenge, a surprise, a task which seems difficult, unwanted, unreasonable, or unachievable, wouldn't it be wonderful if our first response could be "I am the Lord's servant."? How often do we say to ourselves "I am doing this because I have to"? or "I am doing this because I am afraid not to do it"? How much more confidence, love, and endurance might we apply to our care giving if we would see our care for self and others as a service to God, fully in God's will, and guided by God's power? As the Lord's servant, Mary is not responsible for making it turn out "just right". Mary is not responsible for

other people's reactions to her mission, or their opinions. Mary is responsible for believing and acting.

Mary's acceptance of God's mission didn't come without a question. She asked, "How can this be?" When her question was answered, Mary said "I am the Lord's servant." This conversation between Mary and the angel demonstrates how God welcomes our honest questions. Honest questions suggest thoughtfulness and belief and a willingness to take the next step.

In our second reading, we hear Mary's song of praise to God, given during Mary's visit with her relative Elizabeth.

Luke 1:46-48 says:

"Mary said My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."

Our care giving can be infused with faith as we know and constantly affirm God's faithfulness to us and God's mindfulness of us, our situation, and of those for whom we care. No one is forgotten by God.

The thought of what God was doing in Mary's life made her happy. God's actions were not to be feared, but were to be anticipated, embraced, and celebrated.

Care giving can become emotionally and physically trying. When Mary speaks of God's mercy extending from generation to generation, her statement is an assurance our lives are part of God's larger plan for humanity. We are part of a continuum, a timeline, a master plan. Those we care for and work with are part of that master plan as well. We

cannot be isolated, even if we feel alone, because God is mindful of us, of our obligations, of all we do, of all we hope. No one is forgotten by God at any time.

Mary acknowledged the justice and might of God's actions.

Luke 1:51: "He has performed mighty deeds with His arm."

In a time of uncertainty, or confusion, it is tempting to forget or diminish the "mighty deeds" of God. When we feel pain, or sense a lack of direction in ourselves, in those we love, or in the world, we may ask "Why doesn't God do something?" There are times when best efforts and best practices aren't enough. "Why doesn't God do something"? "Where is God in this"? These are reasonable questions, and the questions deserve an intelligent response.

The best response I have found is given by devotional writer Elisabeth Eliot in her book, A Lamp for My Feet. In this book, Eliot quotes 1 Cor. 2:17 in her answer:

"His secret purpose (she writes) has been revealed to us, and it is to bring us finally, not to ruin, but to glory. That is precisely what the Bible tells us: "His secret purpose framed from the very beginning is to bring us to our full glory." (1 Corinthians 2:17)

I know, (Eliot writes), of no more steady hope on which to focus my mind when circumstances tempt me to wonder why God doesn't 'do something.' ***God is always doing something—the very best thing, the thing we ourselves would choose if we knew the end from the beginning.*** (She concludes) He is at work to bring us to our full glory."

On this Mother's Day, let's celebrate care giving, with all of its challenges and blessings. Care giving is God's work and it is our work. Let's remember Mary's legacy of care giving:

- --whatever task we are given, we know we are the Lord's servants, and that knowledge transforms us and our work. God assigns our work and our way.
- --we remember and recall God's mindfulness of us. We may feel alone at times, but we cannot be isolated or separated from God. No one is forgotten by God.
- --we relax in the certainty that God's mighty deeds are good, and will continue and triumph in us, through us, and in the world.

Amen.